GLOBE FILE PHOTO

Ronald L. Skates (left) with J. Thomas West, who was featured in "The Soul of a New Machine."

Executive in Kidder book steps down at Data General

By Joann Muller
GLOBE STAFF

Data General Corp. executive J. Thomas West, who gained renown in Tracy Kidder's 1981 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "The Soul of a New Machine," is stepping down, saying it is time to hand the technology reins to a younger generation.

The 58-year-old senior vice president will remain as a technology consultant to Data General while pursuing civic and personal interests outside the computer industry.

"It's a young people's game," said West, who said he would rather "watch from the

sidelines" as Data General launches new businesses such as its Thiin Line Internet server products, whose development West directed.

In his scaled-down role, he'll work with senior vice president William J. Cunningham and three senior technologists on a new Data General Fellow Program that will plot the company's strategic technology direction.

"Tom West has made lasting contributions to Data General and to our industry," said chief executive Ronald L. Skates. "Over the last 25 years Tom has led the development of generations of new products and has

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nurtured generations of technology leaders as well. We are pleased that he is continuing his relationship with us on a consulting basis."

A graduate of Amherst College, West joined Data General in 1972 as a design engineer. In the late '70s, he managed the team that designed Data General's first 32-bit computer. It was that role that was chronicled in Kidder's well-known book.

Although he led the development of numerous other major product lines at Data General, including its Aviion servers in the late 1980s and, more recently, its Thiin Line Internet servers, West will always be identified by the accomplishments detailed in "The Soul of a New Machine."

"That'll be on my tombstone," he joked. "It's unavoidable."